To the High and Honourable Court of Parliament.

The humble Petition of ſundry of the Nobles, Knights, Gentry, Miniſters, Freeholders, and divers thouſands of the Inhabitants of the County Palatine of Cheſter, whoſe names are ſubſcribed to the ſeverall Schedules hereunto annexed.

In Anſwer to a Petition delivered in to the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, by Sir Thomas Aſton, Baronet, from the County Palatine of CHESTER, concerning Epiſcopacie.

Humbly ſhew;

THAT whereas divers Petitions, by the practiſe of the Prelates and our preſent Dioceſan, have been lately poſted about this County for the continuance of our preſent exorbitant Hierarchie and Church-Government, under which the whole Kingdome hath long time groaned, and the hands of many perſons of ſundry qualities (ſollicited to the ſame by the Prelates agents) with intent to be preferred to this Honourable Houſe, which we conceiving, not ſo much to ayme at our Church and Prelates Reformation, as at the maintenance of their abſolute Juriſdiction and Innovations both in Religion and Government, which will give the greateſt advantage to the adverſaries of our Religion: We hold it our duties to diſavow them all, eſpecially that lately tendred to the Lords Spirituall and Temporall, by Sir Thomas Aſton Baronet.

And humbly pray, that we incurre no miſ-Cenſure, if any ſuch ſcattered Papers have (without our privitie) ſurreptitiouſly aſſumed the name of our County.

We, (as all other Counties of this Realme) are deeply ſenſible of the many common and heavie Grievances (under which the whole three Kingdomes ſuffer) occaſioned by the Prelates, and have juſt cauſe to rejoyce at, and acknowledge with thankfullneſſe, the pious care already taken by your Honours for the ſuppreſſing of the growth of Popery; the better ſupply of able Miniſters in all places to inſtruct the People; removing of all Innovations, and for your indeavours to ſuppreſſe and remove our Lordly Prelates, the ſole Authors of all our preſent miſeries, Innovations, and moſt profeſſed enemies of the Goſpell: and we doubt not but in your great Wiſdomes you will not only regulate the rigour of their exorbitant Eccleſiaſticall Courts, but likewiſe wholly extirpate them, as neither ſuiting with the Temper of our Laws, nor the nature of Free-men.

And when we conſider, that Dioceſan Lordly Biſhops, ſuperiour to Presbyters, were neither Inſtituted, nor heard of, in the time of the Apoſtles, *who alwayes ordayned* [a] *ſundry Biſhops in every particular Congregation, and thoſe all equall in Authority; not one Biſhop over many hundred Churches*, and he paramount his fellow *Presbyters*: That our [b] *Church of England* (with that of *Scotland*) *from the firſt plantation of the Goſpell here, in the Apoſtles dayes, for ſome hundred of yeares after had no Biſhops at all to governe it*. That [c] *all ancient Authors and Hiſtorians* unanimouſly record, *that our Archbiſhops and Biſhops, ſucceeded the Heatheniſh Arch-Flammines and Flammines here planted in times of Paganiſme, both in their Inſtitution, Juriſdiction and Seas*; and ſo are onely of Ethnicall or Diabolicall, not Apoſtolicall Inſtitution. That they were the *greateſt fire-brands of contention, and Authors of* [d] *all the Schiſmes in the firſt generall Councels, and Primitive-Church.* That ſo many of them have ſowed the tares of *Hereſie, Popery, Schiſme, Rebellion, Sedition,* [e] *oppoſed, excommunicated, dethroned, yea murthered Chriſtian Kings, Emperours, and rayſed up many bloody warres, to the effuſion of much Chriſtian blood, in all Kingdomes, where they have ſwayed; preſerved and reſcued Popery and Hereſie from utter extirpation in this and former ages; exceeded the Primitive perſecuters in Martyring and ſhedding the blood of Gods deare Saints.* That to them we owe the corruption of the purity of the Goſpell we now profeſſe, with Romiſh Errors and Superſtitions, as your Honours have already unanimouſly voted. That many of them for the propagation of Popery, and ſuppreſſing of the Truth (eſpecially the Archprelate of Canterbury, *William Laud*, accuſed by your Honours, and committed to the Tower of *London for* * *High Treaſon againſt his Majeſty, our Laws, and eſtabliſhed Religion;* Biſhop *Wren*, Biſhop *Mountague*, Biſhop *Peirce*, Biſhop *Goodman*, and others now in queſtion before this Honourable Aſſembly) are like to become glorious *Martyrs in the Roman Calendar.* That (not divers, but) moſt of them lately, and yet living with us, have been very great Oppugners of our Religion, indeavouring to reduce or captivate it to the common enemie of *Rome*. And that their tyrannicall Papall, Lordly government hath been ſo long oppugned by [f] *infinite godly Martyrs and writers both at home and abroad*; eſtabliſhed (through their own over-ſwaying power, and undermining ſubtiltie) by the Common and Statute Laws of the Kingdome made onely in times of Popery, but of exploded or reſtrained by ſundry Laws and Statutes ſince the time of Reformation, though with little good ſucceſſe: And as yet there is nothing in their Doctrine (generally taught, when they rarely preach) but what is diſſonant from the word of *God*, or the Articles ratified by Law. In this caſe, not to call their government, a perpetuall vaſſalage, an intollerable bondage. And (*prima facie*, though not, *inaudita altera parte*, of whom your Honours have heard ſo much evill already in the Committee for Religion; for the High Commiſſion, Biſhop *Wren*, Biſhop *Peirce*, *the Miniſters Londoners, and other Counties Petitions againſt Prelacie*) not to pray the removall of them, and not to ſeek the utter deſolation and ruine of their Offices as Antichriſtian (as divers Counties elſe have done in their Petitions to your Honours,) we cannot conceive but to reliſh of injuſtice, and uncharitableneſſe, both to the Souls, Bodies and Eſtates of us and our Poſteritie; nor can we joyne with them who petition for their continuance.

But on the contrary, when we conſider the Tenor of ſuch writings and Books as by the Prelates and their agents have been lately ſpread among the people with their publike allowance (as the Prelates *New Canons*, *Oath*, and *Act for a malevolent Benevolence*, *for non payment whereof every Miniſter ſhall at firſt bout be ipſo facto deprived, without the benefit of any Appeale*, Biſhop *Mountagues*, *Dr. Heylins*, *Dr. Pocklingtons*, *Shelfords*, *Dovers*, *Reeves*, *Francis Sales*, *Franciſcus de Sancta Clara*, their late Books, with others: and our Prelates Letters in nature of Commiſſions, for the collecting of the late Lone for the maintenance of the Warres againſt the *Scots*, which Biſhop *Peirce* affirmed in ſundry ſpeeches to the Clergie of his Dioceſe, to be *Bellum Epiſcopale*, the Biſhops Warre, uſing it as the chiefe motive why they ſhould liberally contribute towards it. When we againe ponder the Tenents preached publiquely in Pulpits, and the Contents of many Printed Pamphlets ſwarming every where amongſt us, * *againſt the frequencie power and uſe of Parliaments*; the Right and Liberties of the Subjects, the propriety of their goods; in advancing the exorbitant Juriſdiction of Prelates, their Injunctions and Courts under the name of the Church; their aſſerting of his Majeſties abſolute power both over the Laws, Goods, Lives and Liberties of the Subject, and the like; all of them dangerouſly tending to the introduction of a lawleſſe tyrannie, and arbitrarie form of Government both in Church and State; to rob his Majeſtie of the hearts and loyall affections of his people: And then further conſider, not onely the Biſhops ſeverall uſurpations of the ſole power of the Keyes, and Ordination, but likewiſe their intimations of their deſire of the full power of the Sword, that they in their ſeverall Courts (as they doe in all their High-Commiſſions) may execute both Eccleſiaſticall and Civill Cenſures within themſelves. We cannot but expreſſe our juſt feares, that their intention is to introduce an abſolute Innovation of tyrannicall and Papall Government: Whereby we who are now governed only by the Common and Statute Laws of this Realme made in Parliament, *ſhall be governed* (as our Anti-petitioners confeſſe we are) *only by the Canon and Civill Laws* (*which the now* [g] *Archbiſhop of Canterbury profeſſed he would introduce and governe us by*) made and diſpenſed only by twenty-ſix Ordinaries and their under-Officers (or rather only by one over-potent Arch-Prelate) not eaſily reſponſible to Parliaments, for their deviations from the Rules of Law, ſo long as they enjoy ſuch ample Lordly Revenues, continue Lords in Parliament, Lords of the Privie Counſell, and greateſt ſwaying Officers in the Realme; [h] *able to diſſolve even Parliaments themſelves in caſe they attempt to queſtion them* (as we know by many late experiments;) whereas if we were governed (as was the [i] *Primitive Church*) *by a numerous Presbytery and ruling Elders*, (farre leſſe in power, though more in number) according to the Laws of *God*, and thoſe this Honourable Aſſembly (not the Convocation, or every Biſhop in his Dioceſe at his meere pleaſure) ſhall preſcribe; we dare aſſure our ſelves, no ſuch inconveniences ſhalbe found in that Government, equivalent to thoſe of Epiſcopacie; which how corrigible they have been by Parliaments and Councels, how ill conſiſtent with a Monarchie; and how dangerouſly conducible to an Anarchie; their incorrigibleneſſe, Treaſons, Rebellions, Conſpiracies, with the Warres and tumults occaſioned by them in all former ages, and now, abundantly manifeſt. And therefore we have juſt cauſe to pray againſt their continuance, as fearing their conſequences would prove the utter loſſe of pietie, Libertie, unitie, peace, Laws, and divine learning, and neceſſarily produce an extermination, if not of Nobilitie, Gentrie, and Order, yet certainly of Religion, and all true pietie.

With what vehemencie and arrogancie of Spirit the Prelates and their Inſtruments have proſecuted all good Miniſters and people of all ſorts, even to the loſſe of Members, Blood, Libertie, Life, Goods, Fortunes: and how many thouſands of his Majeſties good Subjects they have driven out of the Realme into Forraigne parts; and how plauſible your Honourable proceedings in this preſent Seſſion of Parliament againſt their Innovations, Canons, Exorbitances, (yea, and their very Callings too) have been to the whole Kingdome (who daily bleſſe *God* for them) we need not repreſent to your honours. And therefore humbly pray, that ſome preſent ſpeedie courſe may be taken, as in your Wiſdomes ſhall be thought fit, to ſuppreſſe all Lordly Prelates, together with the importing, Printing and diſperſing of all Popiſh and Arminian Bookes, and the calling in and burning of thoſe forenamed, (eſpecially of the late Canons, *Oath, and Act for the Benevolence*) which have produced dangerous diſcontents both in the Clergie and common people, We having great cauſe to feare, that of all the diſtempers which at preſent threaten the welfare of this State, there is none more worthy the mature and grave conſideration of this Honourable Aſſembly, then to ſtop the Torrent of ſuch ambitious Spirits, as lye masked under our Lordly Prelates white Rochets, before they ſwell beyond the bounds of Government, and drown his Majeſties three whole Kingdomes in a deluge of blood, and utter deſolation. Then we doubt not but his Majeſtie, perſevering in his gracious inclination to heare the Complaints, and relieve the grievances of his Subjects in frequent Parliaments, it will ſo unite the Head and the Bodie ([k] *ſevered principally by the practiſes and continuance of the Prelates*) and ſo indiſſoluble cement the affections of the people to our Royall Soveraigne; that without any future government at all by Biſhops, he ſhalbe a more abſolute and happy Prince then any of his Predeceſſors, and ſhall never want revenue, and honour, nor his people juſtice.

We have preſumed to annex a Copy of ſeverall Petitions exhibited to your Honours againſt the Prelates this Parliament, and of ſundry Poſitions preached by their inſtruments in this and other Counties, which we conceive imply matter of dangerous conſequence to the peace both of Church and State: together with a briefe Remonſtrance of ſundry Grievances, Innovations and Perſecutions, under which we of this County (eſpecially thoſe of the City of Cheſter) have miſerably ſuffered, by meanes of our now Biſhop, and the High-Commiſſioners at Yorke. All which we humbly ſubmit to your grave judgements, praying that they may be read, and redreſſed.

Subſcribed to this Petition,

Eight Noblemen.
Knight Baronets, Knights and Eſquires, nineſcore and nineteen.
Divines, one hundred and forty; not one of them a maker, taker, or approver of the new &c. Oath and Canons.
Gentlemen, ſeven hundred fifty ſeven.
Freeholders and other Inhabitants, above twelve thouſand.
All of the ſame mind, and County; and not one of them a Popiſh Recuſant.

(a) Acts 11:30. c. 14.23. c. 15. 2. 4. 6. 22, 23. c. 16. 4. c. 20. 17. 28. c. 21. 17, 18. c. 22. 5. *phil.* 1. 1. 1 *Tim.* 5. 17. c. 3. 1. to 9. c. 4. 14. *Tit.* 1. 5, 6, 7. *Jam.* 5. 14. 1 *Pet.* 5. 1, 2. *Rev.* 4. 10. c. 5. 11. 14. c. 7. 11. 13. c. 11. 16. c. 19. 4. If than it be of Divine and Apoſtolicall inſtitution, that there ſhould be many Biſhops and *presbyters* in every particular Church; Then it is point blank againſt it, to erect one Biſhop over many Churches, and one Archbiſhop over many Biſhops, one patriarch over them, and one pope ſuperiour to them all: And if one mans poſſeſſing of a plurality of Churches hath been ever held infamous and unlawfull in all ages, becauſe he cannot diſcharge their cure, much more muſt one Biſhops Superintendencie over many hundreds or thouſands of Churches, which he cannot duly governe and inſtruct, be more unlawfull.

(b) See Biſhop Uſher *De Brit. Eccleſ. primordiis* c. 1, 2, 3, 4. 6, 7, 8. c. 16. pag. 800 *Fordon Scotichron* l. 3. c. 8. *Major de Geſt. Scotor.* l. 2. c. 2.

(c) Biſhop Uſher *De Brit. Eccleſ. primordiis* c. 5. p. 56, 57, 58, 59.

(d) *Cent. Magd.* 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. cap. 8.

(e) See *Balem de viris pontificum.* The Imperiall Hiſtory. *Morney* his myſtery of Iniquity. The Engliſh and French Book of Martyrs, *Holingſhead*, *Speed*, and *Goodmans* Catalogue of Biſhops. * See his Articles.

(f) See *Catalogus Teſtium veritatis*: *Flagellum pontificum* the laſt Edition, and a Catalogue of Teſtimonies in all ages, *&c.* lately printed.

* See the Archbiſhops Articles, n. 2.

(g) See the Archbiſhops Articles Art. 1.

(h) Archbiſhops Articles, Ar. 13.

(i) See the Anſwer to an Humble Remonſtrance. *Gerſomius Bucerus de Gobernat. Eccleſia.*

(k) Archbiſhops Charges Art. 14. Mr. *Nathanael Fines* Speech in parliament, Febr. 9. p.

[Wing T1596A]